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GINA MEYERS

Montecito Miscellany

Local Lotus Star

by Richard Mineards

Yes, that was Montecito interior designer **Penny Bianchi** in the HBO Emmy-winning satirical comedy hit series *The White Lotus* that just wrapped its second successful season at the 111-room historic Four Seasons' San Domenico Hotel in Taormina, Sicily, perched over the glittering Ionian Sea and below the fiery Mt. Etna volcano.

Penny, a near neighbor of former TV talk show titan **Oprah Winfrey**, is a good friend of director **Mike White**, 52, and shot the scene in the spring.

"Mike has been my daughter **Ella**'s best friend since they were infants and he is like a son to me," she tells me. "I have decorated his houses and my granddaughter, **Poppy**, is his goddaughter.

"Poppy worked on the show's first season which was shot at the Four Seasons' Resort Maui at Wailea last year before moving to Sicily this season in a former 14th century convent, where Audrey Hepburn and Oscar Wilde were guests, and she was a location scout. Ella rented a villa and I was introduced in a party scene. It was literally just two seconds, but everybody seems to have seen it, including you.

"All the local waiters seem to have recognized me. The scenes took 12 hours to shoot, but unfortunately Ella ended up on the cutting room floor. My husband **Adam** can't get over it!"

The decidedly risqué show has now been renewed for a third season and will be heading to a luxury resort in Asia.

I can't wait...

Ending on a High-land Note

Tartan ruled supreme at the Lobero when Santa Barbara Revels founder and artistic director **Susan Keller** staged her 13th Yuletide production, a Scottish celebration of the Winter Solstice.



Montecito interior designer Penny Bianchi (center) is a hit in *The White Lotus* (photo by Priscilla)

Set in an imposing baronial hall in the 18th century, the entertaining show opened with a Scottish overture played by the Ben Nevis Brass Ensemble and the Highland Pipes and Drum with an impressive **Bill Egan** as the Laird organizing the traditional Hogmanay, a greeting for the New Year, which had been outlawed at the time being considered a Papist celebration.

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Highland Dancer Beret Dernbach performing (photo by Priscilla)



Bill Egan, Meredith McMinn, Matthew Weitzel, and Tyler X Koontz; Seated: James McCarthy and Susan Keller (photo by Priscilla)

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The Santa Barbara Sheriff Pipe & Drum Corp (photo by Priscilla)

Even bagpipes were considered weapons of war!

Iconic poet Robert Burns was also featured prominently, including "Auld Lang Syne," which he rewrote in 1788, adding two new verses.

James McCarthy, **Meredith McMinn**, **Tyler X Koontz**, and **Matthew Weitzel** played their part along with the Culloden Country Dancers, the Solstice Singers, the Strings of Skye, the Yuletide Youth, the Glencoe Guisers, and the Santa Barbara Sheriff Pipe and Drum Corps.

Stage director **Matt Tavianini** and music director **Susan Lansing-Weller** also did great jobs.

Susan, whose shows I have watched since their inception, always says: "Join us and be joyous."

We did and we were...

A Cracking Good Show

Everybody was clearly going nuts about State Street Ballet's colorful production of *The Nutcracker* at the Granada with hardly a seat to be had to watch Tchaikovsky's masterpiece.

Accompanied by the Opera San Luis

Obispo Grand Orchestra under substitute conductor **Lee Mills**, as well as State Street Ballet Academy students and professional track trainees, the cavernous stage was positively groaning with more than 150 performers showing their talents with an opulent selection of scenic backdrops.

As usual, veteran dancer **Sergei Domrachev** as Drosselmeyer and particularly Mother Ginger was an absolute hoot with various performers playing the role of Clara, the Snow Queen, and the Sugar Plum Fairy depending on the show.

It's a production not to be missed...

Voyces in the Chapel

St. Anthony's Chapel resonated to the sounds of the Quire of Voyces under founder-conductor **Nathan Kreitzer** with an idyllic concert, *Mysteries of Christmas*.

The talented group of singers, founded in 1993, sang an Advent Calendar of a cappella music with each song, from the sacred cathedral sounds of

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A snow-filled spectacular performance of *The Nutcracker* by State Street Ballet (photo by Heidi Bergseteren)



Claudia Bratton, Mark Sargent, Penny Little, and Michael Laferriere (photo by Priscilla)



Jacob Tell, Stacie Bouffard, Oscar Gutierrez, and Penny Little in back (photo by Priscilla)

motets by High Renaissance composer Thomas Tallis to traditional carols, opening a small door to the beauty and delight of Yuletide.

A heavenly performance...

The Summer Solstice Six

Six new board members were announced when the Summer Solstice hosted its winter solstice fundraiser at the Anchor Rose restaurant on the harbor.

The new additions are **Geoffrey**

Barber, Lesley Bronson, Justin Gunn, Ron Burd, David Machacek, and Amisha Zuber.

“We’re excited to have so much talent and expertise on our team!” gushed **Stacie Bouffard**, board president.

The fun dinner fête also featured musical performances from folk-rock duo Love Lightning, **Jim Grippo** from the Middle Eastern ensemble Kanoon, a special performance by BellaDonna, and a cameo Winter Solstice “angel” appearance by Bethany.



Some Christmas celebration guests surrounding the “Charles Dickens Carolers” (photo by Priscilla)



Nolan Nicholson, Dean and Susan Wilson, Dan Walker, and David Sigman (photo by Priscilla)

A Ray of Holiday Cheer

Scientist, inventor, and real estate investor **Ray Winn**, 88, and his partner of 34 years **Peter Kavoian**, 66, pulled out all the stops when they hosted their first Christmas bash for 100 guests in five years at their magnificent Birnam Wood home.

Peter used his gleaming red Bentley convertible as Santa’s sleigh with six reindeer at the entrance to their manse with its Gobelins tapestries, Murano

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Larry Moriarty, Frank Tabar, Alexandra Chambers, and Gene McKnight (photo by Priscilla)

A Present Under Turner’s Tree

Christmas came early for Montecito’s Turner Foundation when president **Dean Wilson** was presented with a check for \$175,000 by polo playing Farmers & Merchants Bank president **Dan Walker** at the financial institution’s annual Yuletide fête at its East Carrillo Street branch.

The 100-guest bash, which featured Dickensian-costumed carol singers and comestibles from Rincon Catering, attracted quite the crowd including **Luke Swetland**, Santa Barbara Polo Club manager **David Sigman**, **Warren Butler**, **Adam McKaig**, **Frank Tabar**, and **Nolan Nicholson**.



Peter Kavoian welcoming guests (photo by Alma Rose Middleton)



Ray Winn and Peter Kavoian showed everyone a spectacular time (photo by Alma Rose Middleton)

Santa has upgraded his sleigh (photo by Alma Rose Middleton)



◀ *Miscellany* (Continued from 20)

glass chandeliers, and a new Bösendorfer grand piano, which even makes Versailles look a tad shabby.

Wallowing in the unadulterated magnificence of the night while noshing on the canapés from **Jean-Philippe Sitbon** were Peter's mother **Anna**, 92, **Jamie** and **Marcia Constance**, **Joyce Dudley**, **Mary Dorra**, **John Saladino**, **Henry** and **Rita Hortenstine**, **Sharol Siemens**, **Anne Fuchs**, **Madison Richardson**, **Richard** and **Annette Caleel**, **Frank** and **Barbara Randall**, **Alex Nourse**, **Hiroko Benko**, **Erin Graffy** and **James Paul Garcia**, **David Selberg**, and **Ricardo Calderon**.

Quite the shindig...

Big Real Estate Deal

Real estate power couple **Ellen DeGeneres** and actress wife **Portia de Rossi** have just broken the record for the most expensive deal ever closed in Santa Barbara County.

The tony twosome have dropped about \$70 million on two neighboring properties of Carpinteria land totaling 10 acres, a 3.4-acre plot with a Tuscan farmhouse-style home at \$41.7 million and an adjacent 6.6-acre lot complete

with a lake for \$28.2 million.

The previous record was for a \$63 million sale of a 237-acre Montecito ranch two years ago.

The couple's new property sits on an oceanside bluff with its own trail down to the beach and 9,066 square feet of interior living space, including a sprawling five-bed, eight-bath main house and a guest house with an additional bedroom and bathroom.

A Christmas Choral

Santa Barbara Choral Society, under veteran conductor **Jo Anne Wasserman**, was in fine form with its eighth annual Hallelujah Project at the Lobero, which also included Sing! program choral students from the Music Academy and pajama-clad president **Scott Reed** in a rocking chair reciting *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

Accompanied by an orchestra, the enthusiastic singers sang a great selection of Yuletide favorites, including "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "The First Nowell," and "White Christmas," as well as Handel's rousing "Hallelujah Chorus" from *The Messiah* conducted by **Ray**



Erica DiBartolomeo, Jo Anne Wasserman, and guest conductor Ray DiBartolomeo (photo by Priscilla)

DiBartolomeo on the Sunday I attended who won the chance to wield the baton in an auction.

A jolly Santa Claus just added to the festive fun...

Nearby Home Sold

After listing for \$36.5 million in July, a beachfront Carpinteria property has sold for \$29.948 million with the buyer paying all-cash.

Insurance mogul **Ron Lockton** purchased the gated Padaro Lane property from the estate of the late California builder Paul Griffin Jr., who died last year.

Lockton also bought all the furniture in a separate transaction for "north of six figures."

The home is around 8,850 square feet on half an acre with 66 feet of ocean frontage. The six-bedroom house also comes with a 1,000-bottle wine cellar.

Local Mom Doesn't Like Phones at Dinner

Montecito actress **Gwyneth Paltrow** has banned her children from having mobile phones at mealtimes because she wants them to engage in "great discourse."

The Oscar-winner insists daughter **Apple** and son **Moses** always sit down at dinner as a family, something she learned from her parents, director Bruce Paltrow and mother actress **Blythe Danner**.

Speaking on a U.K. podcast, Paltrow said: "We felt special being included at the dinner table even though it was a nightly event.

"If they had friends over then we sat with them at the table and had long conversations. It's something I've carried on with my kids as well.

"We always have dinner together as a family with no phones allowed at the table."

A great idea...

Doordan and Ford on Board

John Doordan and **Kate Ford** have joined the board of directors of the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum.

Doordan, a longtime senior manager with worldwide corporate experience, is determined to help preserve Santa Barbara's historic heritage and is president of the nonprofit Santa Barbara Club's Preservation Foundation, and sits on the board of the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, where he currently chairs its historic resources committee.

Ford is best known locally for her roles as an elected member of the Santa Barbara Unified School District board from 2018 to 2022, and as the principal-executive director of the Peabody Charter School.

She has also won two Educator of the Year awards and is a longtime member of the museum's education committee.

Sightings

Singer **Lady Gaga** checking out the Rosewood Miramar... **Behati Prinsloo**, Namibian supermodel wife of Maroon Five rocker **Adam Levine**, shopping at Pierre Lafond... **Ellen DeGeneres** and actress wife **Portia de Rossi** at the Honor Bar.

Pip! Pip! Be safe, wear a mask and get vaccinated. And a Merry Christmas to all. 🍷



Karen Williams, Lorette Harnsberger, and Adrienne De Guevara (photo by Priscilla)



Scott Reed reading to his delighted daughter Ruby and audience (photo by Priscilla)

From musings on the *Royals* to celebrity real estate deals, **Richard Mineards** is our man on the society scene and has been for more than a decade

